**LGBT - Key Definitions**

**What does the acronym “LGBT” mean?**

LGBT stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” In a human rights context, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face both common and distinct challenges. Intersex people (those born with atypical sex characteristics) suffer many of the same kinds of human rights violations as LGBT people, as indicated below. It should be noted that while these terms have increasing global resonance, in different cultures other terms may be used to describe people who form same-sex relationships and those who exhibit non-binary gender identities (such as *hijra, meti,* *lala, skesana, motsoalle, mithli, kuchu, kawein, travesty, muxé,* *fa’afafine, fakaleiti, hamjensgara* and Two-Spirit).

**What is “sexual orientation”?**

Sexual orientation refers to a person’s physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people. Everyone has a sexual orientation, which is integral to a person’s identity. Gay men and lesbian women are attracted to individuals of the same sex as themselves. Heterosexual people (sometimes known as “straight”) are attracted to individuals of a different sex from themselves. Bisexual people may be attracted to individuals of the same or different sex.. People whose attractions span across many different gender identities (male, female, **transgender**, **genderqueer**, **intersex**, etc.) may call themselves pansexual or queer. People may also identify as asexual because they do not experience a sexual attraction to or desire sexual intimacy with anyone. People who are asexual may still desire a romantic relationship but not a sexual one. People who’re unsure about their sexual orientation may call themselves questioning or curious. It’s also important to note that some people don't think any of these labels describe them accurately. Some people don't like the idea of labels at all. Other people feel comfortable with certain labels and not others. It's up to each individual to decide how they want to label themselves, if at all.

**What is “gender identity”?**

Gender identity reflects a deeply felt and experienced sense of one’s own gender. A person’s gender identity is typically consistent with the biological sex identified or assigned to them at birth as male or female. When a person identifies their gender as being the same as sex identified or assigned to them at birth this can be referred to as being cisgender. For people who are transgender, there is an inconsistency between their internal sense of their own gender and the sex they were assigned at birth. In some cases, their appearance and mannerisms and other outwards characteristics may conflict with society’s expectations of gender-normative behavior of men and women. There are also people who reject the notion that gender can only be a binary concept, i.e. either male or female.

**What does “transgender” mean?**

Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of identities

—including transsexual people, cross-dressers, people who identify as third gender or no distinct gender, and others whose appearance and characteristics are perceived as gender atypical. Transwomen identify as women but were classified as males when they were born (sometimes called male to female). Transmen identify as men but were classified female when they were born (sometimes called female to male). Some people who are transgender seek surgery or take hormones to bring their body into alignment with their gender identity; others do not. For some people who are transgender this is an individual choice, for many it is not financially or culturally feasible for them to see medical treatment.

**What does “intersex” mean?**

An intersex person is born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit the typical definition of male or female. This may be apparent at birth or become so later in life. An intersex person may identify as male or female or as neither. Intersex status is not about sexual orientation or gender identity: intersex people experience the same range of sexual orientations and gender identities as non-intersex people.

**How is sexual orientation is different from gender and gender identity.**

Sexual orientation is about who you’re attracted to and who you feel drawn to romantically, emotionally, and sexually. It’s different than [gender identity](https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity). Gender identity isn’t about who you’re attracted to, but about who you feel you ARE — male, female, genderqueer, etc. This means that being transgender isn’t the same thing as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Sexual orientation is about who you want to be with. Gender identity is about who you are.

**What does “queer” mean?**

The term queer can include a variety of sexual identities and gender identities that are anything other than straight and **cisgender**. In the past, “queer” was a word used to hurt and insult people. Some people still find it offensive, particularly those who remember when that word was used in a painful way. Others now use the word with pride to identify themselves. For some people this is also a rejection of the notion that a person’s sexual orientation or gender has to be conceived as binary, ie. one of only two choices. You may not want to refer to someone as “queer” or “gender queer” unless you know that’s how they identify themselves. When talking to someone about their sexual orientation or sexual orientation, use the terms and pronouns that they use. It’s okay (and often encouraged!) to ask what labels folks prefer. A way to ask about a person’s gender is to say “what are your preferred pronouns.” A person may answer “he/him or she/her or they/them.”

**Do people who are asexual have romantic relationships?**

People who identify as asexual may think other people are physically attractive, or they may want to be in romantic relationships with people, but they’re not interested in having sex or doing sexual things with other people. Asexuality has nothing to do with romantic attraction. Many asexual people feel romantically attracted to people — so they may identify as asexual, and also as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight. Asexual people have emotional needs just like everyone else. Some asexual people have romantic relationships, and others aren’t interested in that and may choose to get close to people or experience intimacy through ways other than sex. Asexual people sometimes use the word “ace” for short.  Like other sexual orientations, asexuality isn’t always black and white. There’s a spectrum between being sexual (having sexual attraction) and being asexual. Different people fall into different places on that spectrum. There are also people who don’t feel romantic attraction or want to be in romantic relationships — they may identify as aromantic. Being aromantic and being asexual are two separate things. Some people who are only sexually attracted to people they’re in relationships with identify as demisexual. There is nothing “wrong” with people who are asexual, and there’s no evidence to support that people are asexual because of any kind of mental health or trauma. It’s actually kind of common — some research says that 1 out of 100 adults is asexual.

**What if I don’t want to be labeled? What if my feelings change over time?**

It’s okay if you don’t want to be labeled. Only you can decide what sexual identity best describes you. But some people may feel that none of the common labels feel right to them. Your sexual orientation and identity can remain the same throughout your life. Or it can vary depending on who you’re attracted to, or romantically partnered or sexually active with. This is completely normal. Once you claim a label, there’s no reason why it can’t change as you change.

Changing how you identify doesn’t mean that you’re “confused.” Many folks, old and young, experience changes in who they’re attracted to and how they identify. Our lives and identities may not always be static, but can be more fluid.

***Text Adapted from descriptions at the Planned Parenthood-Website*** [***https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/ sexual-orientation-gender/sexual-orientation***](https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/%20sexual-orientation-gender/sexual-orientation) ***& a factsheet from the United Nations Global Campaign Against Homophobia and Transphobia*** [***https://www.unfe.org/system/unfe-7-UN\_Fact\_Sheets\_v6\_-\_FAQ.pdf***](https://www.unfe.org/system/unfe-7-UN_Fact_Sheets_v6_-_FAQ.pdf)